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Nakada

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(54) **METHOD FOR PRODUCING A GROUP III NITRIDE SEMICONDUCTOR**

USPC 438/29, 4, 46, 47; 257/98
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

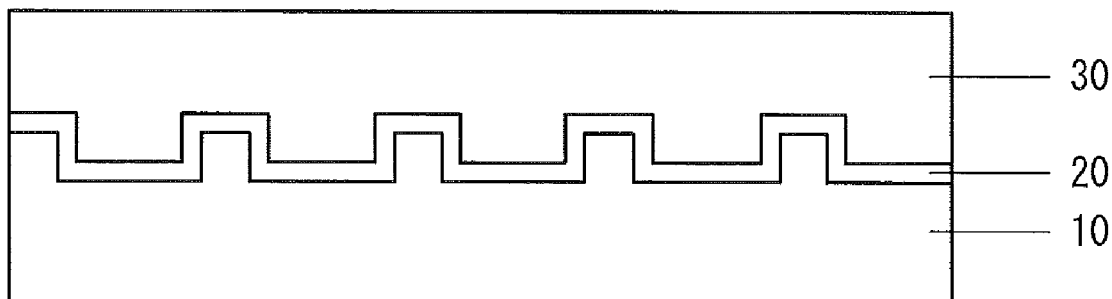
CPC **H01L 21/02365** (2013.01); **C23C 16/0218** (2013.01); **C23C 16/0272** (2013.01); **C23C 16/303** (2013.01); **H01L 21/0242** (2013.01); **H01L 21/0243** (2013.01); **H01L 21/0254** (2013.01); **H01L 21/0262** (2013.01); **H01L 21/02458** (2013.01); **H01L 21/02576** (2013.01); **H01L 21/02579** (2013.01); **H01L 21/02631** (2013.01); **H01L 21/02658** (2013.01)

The surface of a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface is patterned by ICP dry etching. The patterned sapphire substrate is thermally treated in a hydrogen or nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of less than 700° C. or at a temperature of more than 800° C. to 1100° C. An AlN buffer layer is formed by magnetron sputtering on the surface on the patterned side of the sapphire substrate heated at a temperature of 200° C. to less than 700° C. On the buffer layer, a Group III nitride semiconductor layer having a c-plane main surface is formed so as to have a thickness of 1 μm to 10 μm by MOCVD.

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC H01L 33/007; H01L 21/0254; H01L 21/02458; H01L 33/22

15 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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FIG. 1A

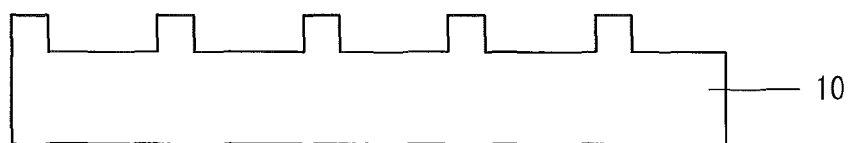


FIG. 1B

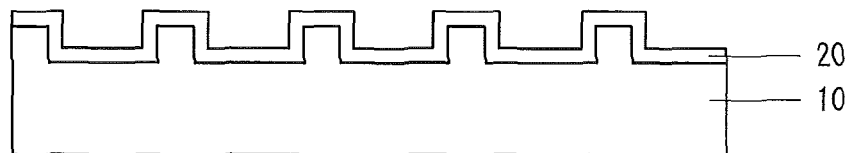


FIG. 1C

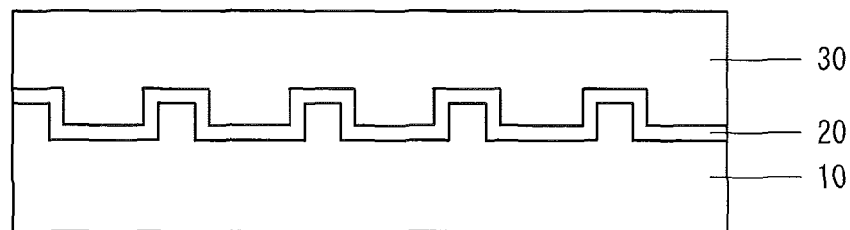


FIG. 2

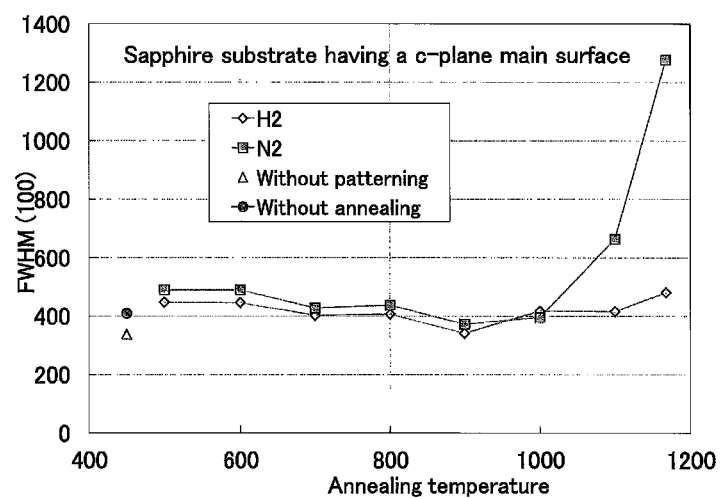


FIG. 3

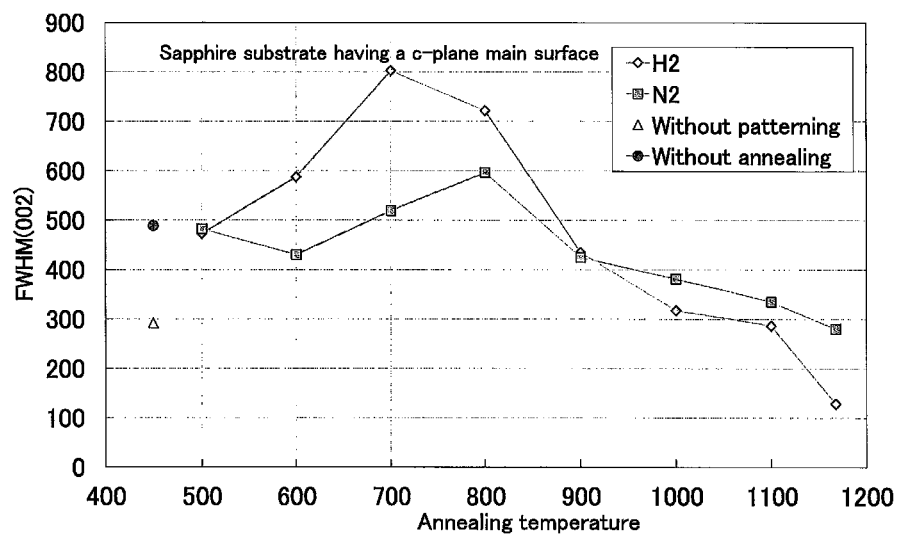


FIG. 4A

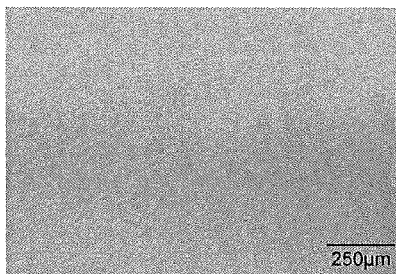


FIG. 4B

800°C

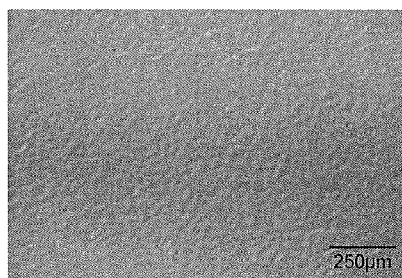


FIG. 4F

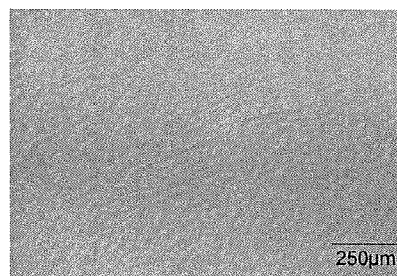


FIG. 4C

700°C

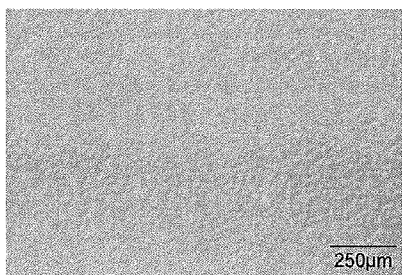


FIG. 4G

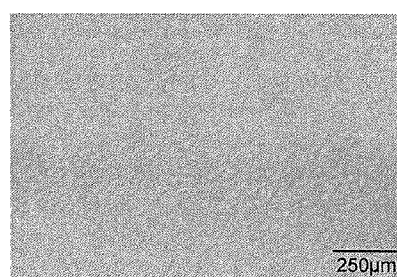


FIG. 4D

600°C

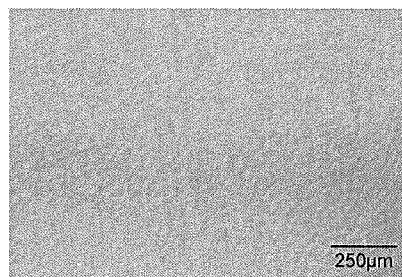


FIG. 4H

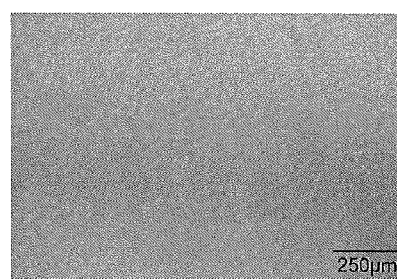


FIG. 4E

500°C

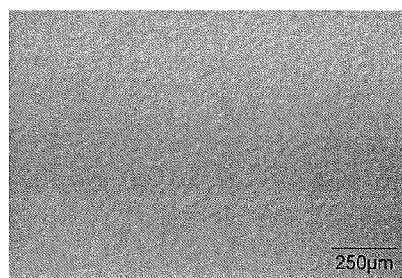
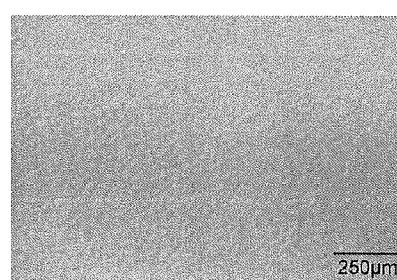


FIG. 4I



H₂ atmosphere

N₂ atmosphere

FIG. 5A
Standard (without patterning and annealing)

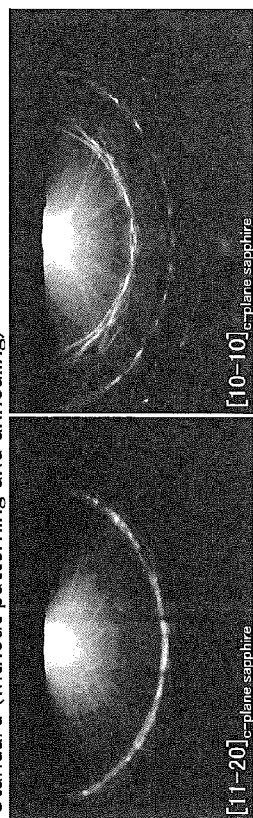


FIG. 5B
Patterning without annealing

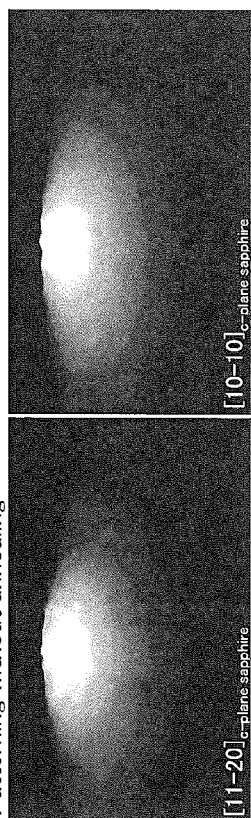


FIG. 5C
H₂ annealing at 500°C after patterning

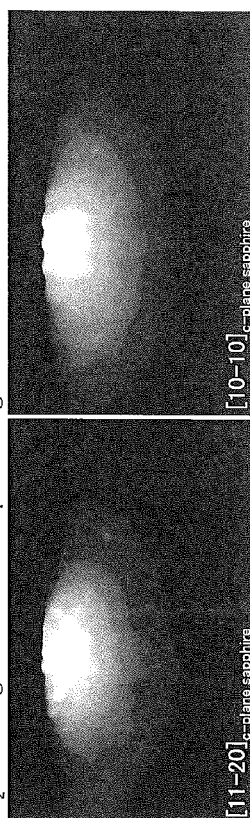


FIG. 5D
H₂ annealing at 700°C after patterning

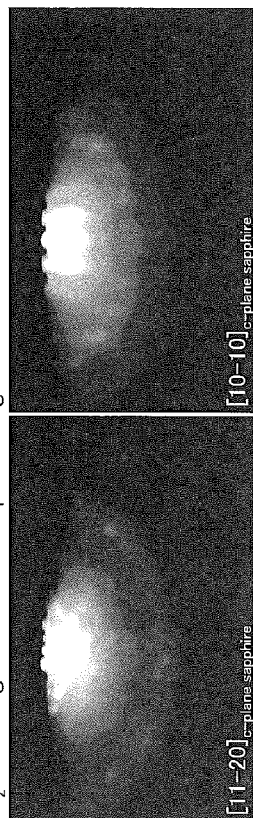


FIG. 5E
H₂ annealing at 800°C after patterning

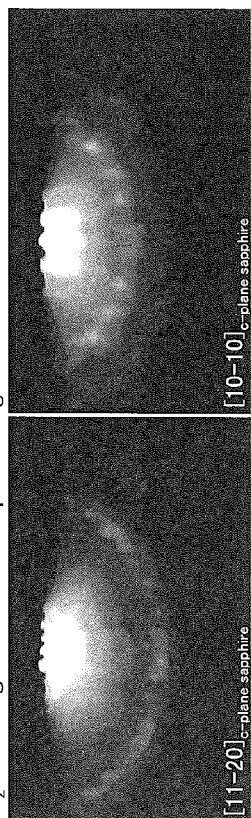


FIG. 5F
H₂ annealing at 1160°C after patterning

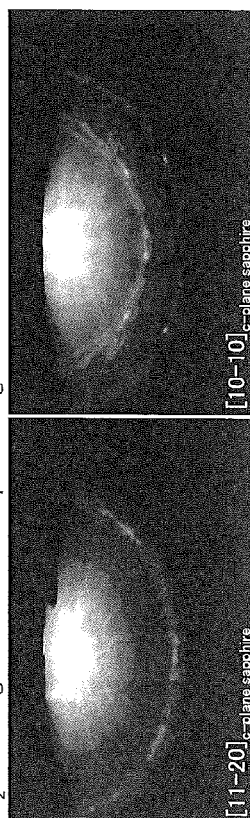


FIG. 6A

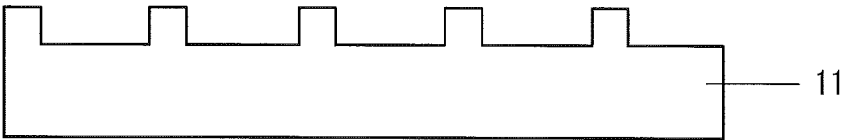


FIG. 6B

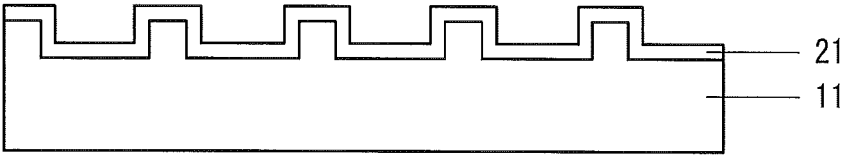


FIG. 6C

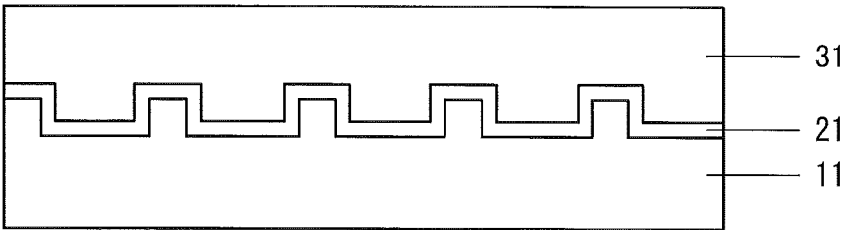


FIG. 7A

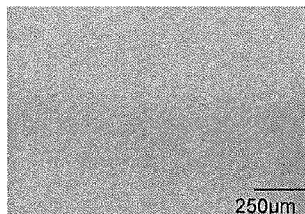
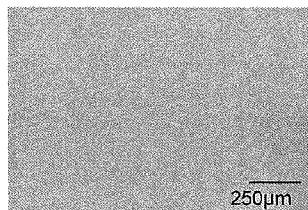


FIG. 7B



1160°C

FIG. 7H

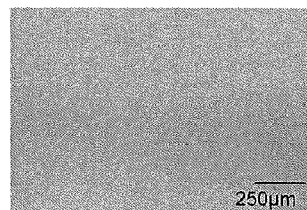
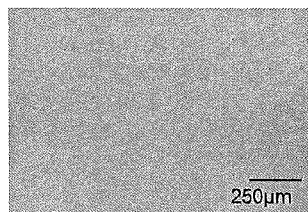


FIG. 7C



1100°C

FIG. 7I

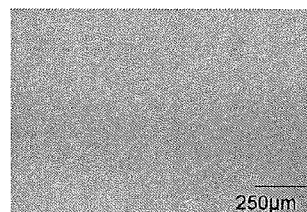
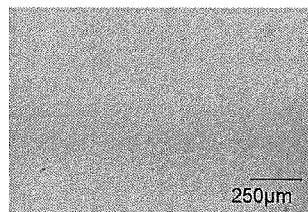


FIG. 7D



1000°C

FIG. 7J

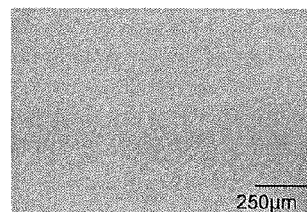
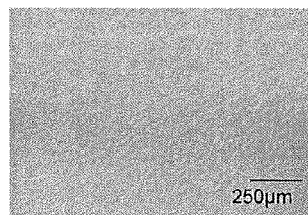


FIG. 7E



900°C

FIG. 7K

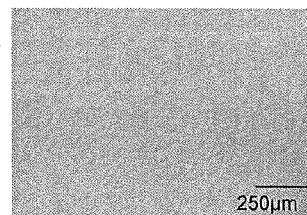
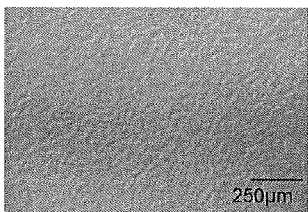


FIG. 7F



800°C

FIG. 7L

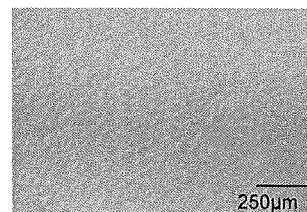
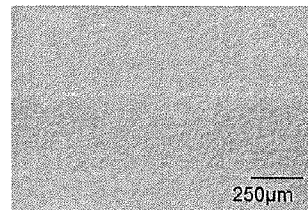
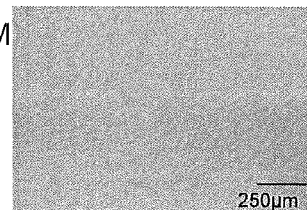


FIG. 7G



700°C

FIG. 7M

H₂ atmosphereN₂ atmosphere

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METHOD FOR PRODUCING A GROUP III NITRIDE SEMICONDUCTOR

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method for forming a Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an AlN buffer layer on a patterned sapphire substrate by sputtering.

2. Background Art

Since the lattice constant of sapphire is significantly different from that of Group III nitride semiconductor in forming a Group III nitride semiconductor on the sapphire substrate by MOCVD, a buffer layer is formed between the sapphire substrate and the Group III nitride semiconductor to reduce the lattice mismatch, thereby improving the crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor. Generally, the buffer layer is made of AlN or GaN grown by MOCVD at a low temperature, but a technique to form the buffer layer by sputtering is also known.

In the method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor light-emitting device, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer is formed via the buffer layer on the patterned sapphire substrate, thereby improving the light extraction efficiency.

Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open (kokai) No. 2010-10363 discloses that after thermal treatment of a sapphire substrate having an a-plane main surface, which is patterned into a concave-convex figure by dry etching, in a hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 1000° C. to 1500° C., an AlN buffer layer is formed on the sapphire substrate having an a-plane main surface by sputtering, and a Group III nitride semiconductor is grown on the buffer layer by MOCVD. It is also disclosed that the thermal treatment under such conditions allows the growth of Group III nitride semiconductor having high crystallinity even on the sapphire substrate having an a-plane main surface damaged by dry etching.

However, the method disclosed in Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open (kokai) No. 2010-10363 requires thermal treatment process at a high temperature, and there was a problem of production cost. Since the atomic arrangement is different on between the a-plane and the c-plane of sapphire, the thermal treatment conditions to form a Group III nitride semiconductor having good surface flatness and crystallinity should be different. However, Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open (kokai) No. 2010-10363 discloses only the case where a sapphire substrate having an a-plane main surface is used. There is no description of thermal conditions about the case where a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface is used.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of the foregoing, an object of the present invention is to improve flatness and crystallinity of Group III nitride semiconductor when an AlN buffer layer is formed on a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface by sputtering and a Group III nitride semiconductor is formed on the buffer layer.

One aspect of the present invention is a method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor comprising growing a Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an AlN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate by sputtering, wherein a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface and a surface patterned in a concave or convex figure by dry etching is used, and a buffer layer is formed after thermal

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treatment (annealing) of the sapphire substrate in a nitrogen or hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature of less than 700° C.

In the thermal treatment before the formation of the buffer layer, the temperature is more preferably from 500° C. to 700° C. Thereby, the surface flatness and crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor can be further improved. The temperature is further preferably from 500° C. to 600° C.

The thermal treatment in the range of the temperature from 500° C. to 700° C. before the formation of the buffer layer is more preferably performed in a nitrogen atmosphere because the surface flatness of the Group III nitride semiconductor is more improved than in a hydrogen atmosphere.

In the present invention, the buffer layer is preferably formed by sputtering on the sapphire substrate heated from 200° C. to 700° C.

Other aspect of the present invention is a method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor comprising growing a Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an AlN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate by sputtering, wherein a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface and a surface patterned in a concave or convex figure by dry etching is used, a buffer layer is formed by sputtering on the sapphire substrate heated at a temperature of 200° C. to less than 700° C., and the sapphire substrate is kept at a normal temperature during the period from after the formation of the buffer layer to before the formation of a Group III nitride semiconductor.

As used herein, the term “normal temperature” refers to a temperature that is obtained without heating or cooling, e.g. within a range of 0° C. to 40° C.

Another aspect of the present invention is a method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor comprising growing a Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an AlN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate by sputtering, wherein a sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface and a surface patterned in a concave or convex figure by dry etching is used, and a buffer layer is formed after the thermal treatment of the sapphire substrate in a nitrogen or hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature greater than 800° C. and not greater than 1100° C.

In the thermal treatment before the formation of the buffer layer, the temperature is more preferably from 900° C. to 1100° C. Thereby, the surface flatness and crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor can be further improved. The temperature is further preferably from 900° C. to 1000° C.

The thermal treatment in the range of the temperature from 800° C. to 1100° C. before the formation of the buffer layer is preferably performed in a hydrogen atmosphere in because the surface flatness of the Group III nitride semiconductor is more improved than in a nitrogen atmosphere.

The buffer layer is preferably formed by sputtering on the sapphire substrate heated from 200° C. to 700° C.

Magnetron sputtering, DC sputtering, RF sputtering, ion beam sputtering, and ECR sputtering may be used to form a buffer layer.

The present invention is particularly effective when the area etched by dry etching is larger than the unetched area (the area protected by a mask).

According to the present invention, a Group III nitride semiconductor with good surface flatness and crystallinity can be formed via the AlN buffer layer formed by sputtering on the patterned sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface. The production method according to the present invention does not require thermal treatment at a high temperature, thereby reducing the production cost.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various other objects, features, and many of the attendant advantages of the present invention will be readily appreci-

ated as the same becomes better understood with reference to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGS. 1A to 1C are sketches showing processes for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 1.

FIG. 2 is a graph showing a relationship between thermal treatment temperature and crystallinity.

FIG. 3 is a graph showing a relationship between thermal treatment temperature and crystallinity.

FIGS. 4A to 4I are photos of GaN surface.

FIGS. 5A to 5F are photos of sapphire substrate RHEED pattern.

FIGS. 6A to 6C are sketches showing processes for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 3.

FIGS. 7A to 7M are photos of GaN surface.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A specific embodiment of the present invention will next be described with reference to the drawings. However, the present invention is not limited to the embodiment.

Embodiment 1

Firstly, a sapphire substrate **10** having a c-plane main surface was prepared. One surface of the sapphire substrate was patterned by ICP dry etching (FIG. 1A). The pattern includes a dot pattern in which concaves and convexes are periodically arranged or a stripe pattern. In the case of dot pattern, each dot has a planar shape of hexagon, rectangle, triangle, circle, and others, and a three-dimensional shape of pyramid, circular cone, prism, cylinder, truncated pyramid, circular truncated cone, and others which respectively have the above-mentioned planar shape on the top surface of the dot.

The pattern preferably has a depth (height of dot pattern convex, depth of dot pattern concave, or depth of stripe groove) of 0.1 μm to 10 μm . When the depth is less than 0.1 μm , the light extraction efficiency is not sufficiently improved in the light emitting device according to the present invention. When the depth exceeds 10 μm , the pattern of the Group III nitride semiconductor formed on the sapphire substrate **10** is incompletely filled in, and thus a flat Group III nitride semiconductor cannot be obtained, which is not preferable.

Subsequently, the patterned sapphire substrate **10** was subjected to thermal treatment in a hydrogen or nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of less than 700° C. The pressure was normal. In the thermal treatment, heating was stopped to lower the temperature to a normal temperature immediately after heating to a designated temperature. The thermal treatment may be performed using a magnetron sputter used in the next process or other device. The lower limit of the thermal treatment temperature is a normal temperature.

Next, the patterned sapphire substrate **10** was placed in a chamber of the magnetron sputtering apparatus. With the sapphire substrate **10** heated at any temperature in a range from 200° C. to less than 700° C., an AlN buffer layer **20** was formed on the patterned surface of the sapphire substrate **10** by the magnetron sputter (FIG. 1B). AlN was deposited by using a high-purity metallic aluminum target and introducing a nitrogen gas in the chamber of the magnetron sputtering apparatus.

DC sputtering, RF sputtering, ion beam sputtering, and ECR sputtering other than magnetron sputtering may be used to form the buffer layer **20**.

Subsequently, the sapphire substrate **10** was taken out from the chamber of the sputtering apparatus and placed in a MOCVD equipment, and a Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** having a c-plane main surface was grown so as to have a thickness of 1 μm to 10 μm on the buffer layer **20** by MOCVD (FIG. 1C). The raw material gases employed for MOCVD were as follows: ammonia (NH_3) as a nitrogen source; trimethylgallium ($\text{Ga}(\text{CH}_3)_3$) as a Ga source; trimethylindium ($\text{In}(\text{CH}_3)_3$) as an In source; trimethylaluminum ($\text{Al}(\text{CH}_3)_3$) as an Al source; silane (SiH_4) as a Si dopant gas; bis(cyclopentadienyl)magnesium ($\text{Mg}(\text{C}_5\text{H}_5)_2$) as a Mg dopant gas, and hydrogen (H_2) or nitrogen (N_2) as a carrier gas. When the present invention is applied to a method for producing a light-emitting device, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** comprises an n-type layer, a light-emitting layer, and a p-type layer which are deposited in this order.

This is the method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 1. In this production method, thermal treatment is performed under the above temperature conditions before the formation of the buffer layer **20** after the sapphire substrate **10** was patterned. Therefore, even if the patterned sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface **10** is used, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** with good surface flatness and crystallinity can be formed via the buffer layer **20** on the sapphire substrate **10**. Moreover, in the method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 1, thermal treatment is performed at a comparatively low temperature of less than 700° C., and thermal treatment at a high temperature is not required, thereby reducing the production cost.

The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 1 is particularly effective when the sapphire substrate **10** is patterned such that the surface area etched by dry etching of the sapphire substrate **10** is larger than the unetched area protected by a mask. In the case of such pattern, the Group III nitride semiconductor is largely grown on a portion damaged by dry etching. But conventionally, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** with good crystallinity could not be formed. However, even in the case of such pattern, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** with good crystallinity can be obtained by employing the present invention.

In the thermal treatment before the formation of the buffer layer **20**, the temperature is more preferably from 500° C. to less than 700° C. because the surface flatness and crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** can be further improved. Further preferably, the temperature is from 500° C. to 600° C. Thermal treatment is preferably performed in a nitrogen atmosphere than in a hydrogen atmosphere because the surface flatness of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** is further improved.

Embodiment 2

A method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 2 is the same as the production method according to Embodiment 1 except that thermal treatment is not performed before the formation of the buffer layer **20**. That is, while the temperature is kept at a normal temperature without performing thermal treatment after the sapphire substrate **10** was patterned, the AlN buffer layer **20** is formed by magnetron sputtering.

The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 2 also allows the formation

of Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30** having good surface flatness and crystallinity, similar to the case of the production method according to Embodiment 1. Moreover, since thermal treatment is not performed, the production process can be simplified and the production cost can be reduced. This is because the sapphire substrate **10** is heated by the magnetron sputtering, which substitutes for thermal treatment before the formation of the buffer layer **20**. Thus, the temperature of the sapphire substrate **10** in forming the buffer layer **20** by magnetron sputtering is more preferably from 500° C. to less than 700° C., and further preferably from 500° C. to 600° C.

In Embodiments 1 and 2, during the period from the time when the sapphire substrate **10** is taken out from the sputtering apparatus, to the time when it is placed in the MOCVD equipment, removing electricity from the buffer layer **20** (electrically neutralizing the buffer layer **20**) is preferable. This is because the buffer layer **20** formed by sputtering is electrically charged and exposed to an atmosphere when the sapphire substrate **10** is transferred from the sputtering apparatus to the MOCVD equipment, and as a result, fine dusts stick to the buffer layer **20**, which affect the crystallinity of Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30**. Therefore, electric neutralization of the buffer layer **20** can prevent fine dusts from sticking, and improve the crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **30**. Electrical neutralization is performed, for example, by supplying the air ionized by an ionizer onto the surface of the buffer layer **20**.

Embodiment 3

As shown in FIG. 6A, a sapphire substrate **11** having a c-plane main surface was prepared. One surface of the sapphire substrate was patterned by ICP dry etching to have a periodical concave and convex pattern. The shape, size and concave depth of pattern are the same as those according to Embodiment 1.

Subsequently, the patterned sapphire substrate **11** was subjected to thermal treatment in a hydrogen or nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of more than 800° C. to 1100° C. The pressure was normal. In the thermal treatment, heating was stopped to lower the temperature to a normal temperature immediately after heating to a designated temperature. The thermal treatment may be performed using a magnetron sputtering apparatus used in the next process or other device.

Next, the patterned sapphire substrate **11** was placed in a chamber of the magnetron sputtering apparatus. With the sapphire substrate **11** heated from 200° C. to less than 700° C., an AlN buffer layer **21** was formed on the patterned surface of the sapphire substrate **11** by the magnetron sputter (FIG. 6B). The conditions for forming the buffer layer were the same as those according to Embodiment 1.

In the present Embodiment as well as in Embodiments 1 and 2, DC sputtering, RF sputtering, ion beam sputtering and ECR sputtering other than magnetron sputtering may be used to form the buffer layer **21**.

Subsequently, the sapphire substrate **11** was taken out from the chamber of the sputtering apparatus and placed in a MOCVD equipment, and a Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** having a c-plane main surface was grown so as to have a thickness of 1 μm to 10 μm on the buffer layer **21** by MOCVD (FIG. 6C). The raw material gases employed and growth conditions for MOCVD were the same as those according to Embodiment 1.

This is the method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 3. In this production method, thermal treatment is performed in a hydrogen or

nitrogen atmosphere, at a temperature of more than 800° C. to 1100° C. before the formation of the buffer layer **21** after the sapphire substrate **11** was patterned. Therefore, even if the patterned sapphire substrate having a c-plane main surface **11** is used, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** having with good surface flatness and crystallinity can be formed via the buffer layer **21** on the sapphire substrate **11**.

The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to Embodiment 3 is particularly effective when the sapphire substrate **11** is patterned such that the surface area etched by dry etching of the sapphire substrate **11** is larger than the unetched area protected by a mask. In the case of such pattern, the Group III nitride semiconductor is largely grown on a portion damaged by dry etching. But conventionally, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** with good crystallinity could not be formed. However, even in the case of such pattern, the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** with good crystallinity can be obtained by employing the present invention.

In the thermal treatment before the formation of the buffer layer **21**, the temperature is more preferably from 900° C. to 1100° C. because the surface flatness and crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** can be further improved. Further preferably, the temperature is from 900° C. to 1000° C. Thermal treatment is preferably performed in a hydrogen atmosphere than in a nitrogen atmosphere because the surface flatness of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31** is further improved.

During the period from the time when the sapphire substrate **11** is taken out from the sputtering apparatus, to the time when it is placed in the MOCVD equipment, removing electricity from the buffer layer **21** (electrically neutralizing the buffer layer **21**) is preferable. This is because the buffer layer **21** formed by sputtering is electrically charged and exposed to an atmosphere when the sapphire substrate **11** is transferred from the sputtering apparatus to the MOCVD equipment, and as a result, fine dusts stick to the buffer layer **21**, which affect the crystallinity of Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31**. Therefore, electric neutralization of the buffer layer **21** can prevent fine dusts from sticking, and improve the crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor layer **31**. Electrical neutralization is performed, for example, by supplying the air ionized by an ionizer onto the surface of the buffer layer **21**.

EXPERIMENTAL EXAMPLES

Next will be described Experimental Examples supporting Embodiments 1, 2, and 3.

FIGS. 2 and 3 are graphs showing a relationship between the temperature of thermal treatment performed before the formation of the buffer layers **20** and **21** and the crystallinity of the Group III nitride semiconductor layers **30** and **31**. The crystallinity was evaluated by the X-ray rocking curve (XRC) measurements. FIG. 2 shows the XRC full width at half maximum values for (10-10) plane ((100) plane when represented by three indices), and FIG. 3 shows the XRC full width at half maximum values for (0002) plane ((002) plane when represented by three indices). The XRC full width at half maximum was measured respectively when thermal treatment is performed in a hydrogen atmosphere and when thermal treatment is performed in a nitrogen atmosphere. The Group III nitride semiconductor layers **30** and **31** were an undoped GaN layer having a thickness of 3 μm. The entire surface of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** were patterned by ICP dry etching. The sapphire substrates **10** and **11** were heated at a temperature of 450° C. when forming the buffer layer **20** and **21**. For comparison, the XRC full width at half

maximum (as shown by the mark “•”) was measured when thermal treatment is not performed before the formation of the buffer layers **20** and **21** (corresponding to Embodiment 2). And the XRC full width at half maximum (as shown by the mark “Δ”) was measured when the surface of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** is not dry etched and thermal treatment is not performed. It can be evaluated that the closer to the target crystallinity in the case when both dry etching and thermal treatment are not performed, the better the crystallinity.

As is clear from FIG. 2, the XRC full width at half maximum for the GaN (10-10) plane is small both in a hydrogen atmosphere and in a nitrogen atmosphere in a thermal treatment temperature range of 500° C. to 1100° C., resulting in good crystallinity. The crystallinity is almost the same as when thermal treatment is not performed for the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** and slightly lower than when both dry etching and thermal treatment are not performed. However, at a temperature in a range of 700° C. to 800° C., pits were observed on GaN. At a temperature of more than 1100° C., the XRC full width at half maximum increased in a nitrogen atmosphere, resulting in deterioration of crystallinity. It was observed that in a hydrogen atmosphere, the XRC full width at half maximum slightly increased at a temperature of more than 1100° C.

As is clear from FIG. 3, the XRC full width at half maximum for the GaN (0002) plane when thermal treatment was performed in a hydrogen atmosphere had a characteristic of gradually increasing in a temperature range of 500° C. to 700° C., and decreasing in a temperature range of 800° C. or more. At a temperature from 700° C. to 800° C., the full width at half maximum was large, the GaN (0002) plane exhibited low crystallinity. On the other hand, when thermal treatment was performed in a nitrogen atmosphere, the XRC full width at half maximum had a characteristic of being almost constant up to 700° C., increasing at a temperature of more than 700° C., and decreasing in a temperature range of 800° C. or more. As is in a hydrogen atmosphere, at a temperature of more than 700° C. and less than 800° C., the XRC full width at half maximum was large, resulting in low crystallinity. In a temperature range of 500° C. to 900° C., the XRC full width at half maximum was smaller in a nitrogen atmosphere than in a hydrogen atmosphere, and in a temperature range of 900° C. or more, the XRC full width at half maximum was smaller in a hydrogen atmosphere than in a nitrogen atmosphere. When thermal treatment was not performed, the XRC full width at half maximum was equal to that when thermal treatment was performed in a nitrogen atmosphere in a temperature range from 500° C. to 700° C. When both dry etching and thermal treatment were not performed for the sapphire substrates **10** and **11**, the XRC full width at half maximum was lower by 200 arc sec than when thermal treatment was performed in a nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 500° C. to 700° C.

FIGS. 4A to 4I and 7A to 7M are photos taken of the surface of GaN formed in the experiments of FIGS. 2 and 3. FIG. 4A shows the case when thermal treatment was not performed, and FIGS. 4B to 4E show the cases when thermal treatment was performed in a hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 800° C., 700° C., 600° C., and 500° C. respectively. FIGS. 4F to 4I show the cases when thermal treatment was performed in a nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 800° C., 700° C., 600° C., and 500° C. respectively. As is clear from FIGS. 4A to 4I, the surface flatness of GaN is higher when the thermal treatment temperature was 500° C. or 600° C. than when the thermal treatment temperature was 700° C. or 800° C., either in a hydrogen atmosphere or in a nitrogen atmosphere. When the thermal treatment temperature was

700° C. or 800° C., pits were observed. Even when thermal treatment was not performed, the GaN surface was as flat as when thermal treatment was performed at a temperature of 500° C. or 600° C.

FIGS. 7A to 7M are also photos taken of the surface of GaN formed in the experiments of FIGS. 2 and 3. FIG. 7A shows the case when thermal treatment was not performed, and FIGS. 7B to 7G show the cases when thermal treatment was performed in a hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 1160° C., 1100° C., 1000° C., 900° C., 800° C., and 700° C. respectively. FIGS. 7H to 7M show the cases when thermal treatment was performed in a nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 1160° C., 1100° C., 1000° C., 900° C., 800° C., and 700° C. respectively. As is clear from FIGS. 7A to 7M, the surface flatness of GaN is higher when the thermal treatment temperature was 1160° C., 1100° C., 1000° C., or 900° C. than when the thermal treatment temperature was 700° C. or 800° C., either in a hydrogen atmosphere or in a nitrogen atmosphere. When the thermal treatment temperature was 700° C. or 800° C., pits were observed.

It was found from FIGS. 2 to 4 that GaN having excellent surface flatness and crystallinity can be obtained if thermal treatment is performed at a temperature of less than 700° C. in a hydrogen atmosphere or in a nitrogen atmosphere. It was also found that GaN having excellent surface flatness and crystallinity can be obtained even if thermal treatment is not performed.

It was found from FIGS. 2, 3 and 7 that GaN having excellent surface flatness and crystallinity can be obtained if thermal treatment is performed in a hydrogen atmosphere or in a nitrogen atmosphere at a temperature of more than 800° C. to 1100° C. It was also found that when the thermal treatment temperature was from 900° C. to 1100° C., crystallinity can be further improved.

FIGS. 5A to 5F are photos of RHEED (Reflection High Energy Electron Diffraction) pattern of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** after thermal treatment. The sapphire substrates **10** and **11** have a c-plane main surface, and the entire surface is patterned by ICP dry etching as in the case of FIGS. 2 to 4. For comparison, the RHEED pattern was photographed in the case when both dry etching and thermal treatment were not performed, and in the case when only dry etching was performed and thermal treatment was not performed. Thermal treatment was performed in a hydrogen atmosphere at a temperature of 500° C., 700° C., 800° C., and 1160° C. Moreover, the electron beam was incident in two directions: [11-20] direction and [10-10] direction of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** having a c-plane main surface.

When both dry etching and thermal treatment were not performed as in FIG. 5A, the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** have no surface roughness due to dry etching, thereby obtaining clear pattern. On the contrary, when thermal treatment was not performed after dry etching as in FIG. 5B, the pattern was blurred, and the surface roughness was observed. As is clear from FIGS. 5C to 5F, the higher the thermal treatment temperature, the clearer the pattern, and the surface roughness is gradually recovered.

The reason for low surface flatness and crystallinity of GaN at the thermal treatment temperature of 700° C. to 800° C. can be inferred as follows from the experiment results of FIGS. 2 to 5. When the thermal treatment temperature is less than 700° C., the surface roughness of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** is almost even, GaN is also grown uniformly on the rough surface of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11**, resulting in excellent surface flatness and crystallinity of GaN. When the thermal treatment temperature is more than 800° C., the surface roughness of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** is suffi-

ciently recovered, and GaN is uniformly grown on the recovered surface, resulting in excellent surface flatness and crystallinity. However, when the thermal treatment temperature is from 700° C. to 800° C., the surface roughness of the sapphire substrates **10** and **11** is slightly recovered but not uniformly recovered, and thus the recovered portion and the unrecovered portion are mixed. Therefore, GaN is grown on both the recovered portion and the unrecovered portion, which are mixed into a crystal, thereby deteriorating the surface flatness or crystallinity of GaN.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor comprising:

growing the Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an MN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate by sputtering, the sapphire substrate having an etched surface of a c-plane main surface which is patterned in a concave or convex figure by dry etching; and

performing thermal treatment on the etched surface of the sapphire substrate which is exposed in at least one selected from a nitrogen atmosphere and a hydrogen atmosphere at a thermal treatment temperature in a range of 500° C. to less than 700° C.;

lowering a temperature of the sapphire substrate to a temperature in a range from 0° C. to 40° C. after heating to the thermal treatment temperature and finishing the thermal treatment of the sapphire substrate;

after the lowering of the temperature, increasing the temperature of the sapphire substrate with the exposed and etched surface to a sputtering temperature in a range of 200° C. to less than 700° C. for forming the buffer layer; and

after the increasing of the temperature, forming the buffer layer on the exposed and etched surface of the sapphire substrate on which the thermal treatment is finished, by sputtering while keeping the temperature of the sapphire substrate at the sputtering temperature.

2. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **1**, wherein the thermal treatment temperature is in a range of 500° C. to 600° C.

3. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **2**, wherein the thermal treatment is performed in a nitrogen atmosphere.

4. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **2**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

5. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **1**, wherein the thermal treatment is performed in a nitrogen atmosphere.

6. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **5**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

7. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **1**, wherein the buffer layer is

electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

8. A method for producing a Group III nitride semiconductor comprising:

growing the Group III nitride semiconductor by MOCVD after forming an MN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate by sputtering, the sapphire substrate having an etched surface of a c-plane main surface which is patterned in a concave or convex figure by dry etching; and

performing thermal treatment on the etched surface of the sapphire substrate which is exposed in at least one selected from a nitrogen atmosphere and a hydrogen atmosphere at a thermal treatment temperature in a range of not less than 900° C. and less than 1100° C.;

lowering a temperature of the sapphire substrate to a temperature in a range from 0° C. to 40° C. after heating to the thermal treatment temperature and finishing the thermal treatment of the sapphire substrate;

after the lowering of the temperature, increasing the temperature of the sapphire substrate with the exposed and etched surface to a sputtering temperature in a range of 200° C. to less than 700° C. for forming the buffer layer; and

after the increasing of the temperature, forming the buffer layer on the exposed and etched surface of the sapphire substrate on which the thermal treatment is finished, by sputtering while keeping the temperature of the sapphire substrate at the sputtering temperature.

9. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **8**, wherein the thermal treatment temperature is in a range of not less than 1000° C. and less than 1100° C.

10. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **9**, wherein the thermal treatment is performed in a hydrogen atmosphere.

11. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **10**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

12. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **9**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

13. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **8**, wherein the thermal treatment is performed in a hydrogen atmosphere.

14. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **13**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

15. The method for producing the Group III nitride semiconductor according to claim **8**, wherein the buffer layer is electrically neutralized after the forming of the buffer layer and before the growing of the Group III nitride semiconductor on the buffer layer.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 9,214,336 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 13/955836
DATED : December 15, 2015
INVENTOR(S) : Naoyuki Nakada

Page 1 of 1

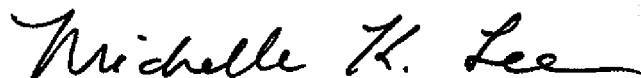
It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Claims

In column 9, line 16, Claim 1 please replace --“after forming an MN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate”-- with --“after forming an AlN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate”--

In column 10, line 7, Claim 8 please replace --“after forming an MN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate”-- with --“after forming an AlN buffer layer on a sapphire substrate”--

Signed and Sealed this
Fifteenth Day of March, 2016



Michelle K. Lee
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office